

# What's My Next Step?

## *Growing in Faith*

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

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I want to start today by asking five questions that all have a similar answer. How do you eat an elephant? Which is a strange question, by the way. I'm not sure I know anybody that's ever ate an elephant, but how would you eat an elephant? The answer, of course, is one bite at a time. How do you run a marathon? One step at a time. How do you save a million dollars? One dollar at a time.

How do you get back into shape? Well, you lose one pound at a time, and certainly by not eating the elephant, that would help. And finally, how do you grow in your faith one step at a time? For most of us, the idea of getting from where we are to where we want to be feels like a mountain that we could never climb.

It's difficult for us to comprehend a path that gets us from where we are standing to our end goal, from point A to point B. Therefore, many of us don't even try, and we believe the lie that we are simply incapable of arriving at our goals. But the key to getting from where we are to where we want to be is to have a plan or a path that is marked with goals that are attainable today, one step at a time.

Sometimes it is truly having goals that are attainable one hour at a time, one moment at a time. Think about how many careers revolve around this idea of helping others discover that plan or that step in order to accomplish a goal. As I was thinking about this message, I thought of all of the different careers that have as their main goal helping others reach their goals.

Careers like financial advisors, personal trainers, dieticians, even careers like teachers or professors, coaches, consulting firms, and as I thought about this, yes, even pastors. A huge part of all of these careers is to help others reach their goal.

It is giving them that next attainable step that they can see and they can even visualize and to continue to reassure them that if they keep taking that next step, it will end where they want to be. As I thought about many of these industries, they are truly multi-billion dollar industries. Think about financial advisors. Think about coaches and professors and teachers.

Many of these are multi-billion dollar industries, and only about 10% of what they help us with is actually head knowledge. And the other 90% is discipline enforcement. Have you ever thought about that? Ten percent is head knowledge, ninety percent is discipline enforcement. And of course, every single one of us is more likely to take advice from someone who is already living out our goal.

And it's an example for me personally, I would take running advice from somebody who has run multiple marathons. I will take financial advice from someone who has already done it and succeeded. I will take health advice from somebody who has lost 50 pounds and stayed in shape. You see, the truth is, there are no secrets to succeeding in these areas. There's no secrets to losing weight or saving money or getting better at a sport.

How you succeed is doing what you already know you are supposed to do. That's the 10% head knowledge and the 90% discipline and enforcement. I'm apparently at the age where Facebook and Google thinks that I should

be doing chair Tai Chi. Have you guys seen this? I feel like I'm slightly offended by this, but they continue to show up all of these advertisements. Hey, you need to be doing this chair, Tai Chi.

It's supposedly this huge secret. It's a revolution in how to lose weight. You don't need to be running anymore. Just do this chair Tai Chi, when in reality, I know what will work if I want to lose weight and get in better shape. I know that I need to consume less culverts and be more active, right? It's common sense. It's just normal knowledge that I need to do, but it's the discipline that's the hard part. It's not eating culverts and being more active.

Now today, I want to inform you, if you already didn't know, that there are no secrets in how to take your next step toward Jesus. It's not some amazing thing that you've never thought of before. If you want to grow in your faith, it's not learning some secret method and how to do that, it's pretty easy to figure out, but it is actually doing it that is hard. It's the doing part that is difficult.

And so part of my responsibility, I view as a pastor, a pastor of this flock, is to help lead by example and to motivate you to do those things that you already know you're supposed to do. Our vision and our mission statement here at Fairview is intentionally simple. It is helping people take their next step toward Jesus.

We are all on a different part of our journey and our relationship with Jesus, and so I thought it would be good for us as a congregation to look over the next two weeks at seven to eight possible next steps in your faith journey. Because we are all at a different place in our journey, we're all at a different spot in this process, and I will share these steps in a somewhat sequential order, but they don't always work that way, especially when you get to some of these later steps.

It's possible that maybe you skipped a step or you missed a step in the beginning, and I will encourage you, it's more than okay and possible to go back and to pick up on that step that maybe you missed. But as I share these steps with you, I just want to let you know from the very beginning, these are not going to be life-shattering secrets. You're not going to walk away from church today or next week and say, "Man, pastor is very wise.

I did not ever think of some of these things." Instead, you will say, "Yeah, these are the normal things, the expected things of what I would think I'm going to hear in church to grow in my faith with Jesus. But if you talk with anybody who you admire their faith, you look at them and say, "Man, I would love to have a faith like so-and-so. I promise that if you were to ask them, how did you arrive where you're at?

They are going to give you these same answers." So let me pray, and then today we're going to try to work through those first four steps in our relationship with Jesus. Heavenly Father, we come before You today. Grateful for the opportunity we have to gather and to worship in freedom, that we can gather with like-minded people and lift up your name. Father, I know that in a room this size, there are people all over the spectrum on their journey with Jesus.

There are some people here that have been asked to come, maybe this is their first time stepping into a church ever, and they're just trying to figure out if they buy into any of this, if any of it's real. There are other people who are here that have been walking with you and had a relationship with you for decades, and they want to continue to grow. And so I thank you, God, that you meet us wherever we are at on that journey and that you long to grow closer.

Father, I thank you that you never hold up your hands and say, "Nope, that's too close. You need to take a step back." Father, You are always drawing us in closer to You, and we are so incredibly grateful. So, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen. The very first step to a great relationship with Jesus is what we call salvation.

Now, there are obviously other steps before salvation, and I'm going to define what this means when we say this, somebody has been saved. We're going to look at Romans chapter 10, verses 9 and 10, and the author tells us this, that if you declare with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and if you believe in your heart that God raised Him

from the dead, then you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith, and you are saved.

Now, again, there are many steps that lead us to this point of salvation, but your relationship with Jesus begins when you submit to Him and to His authority in your life. This is when that relationship begins, when you proclaim with your mouth that Jesus is Lord. For those of you that have been a part of the church for a long time, you know that I've talked about this idea that it is more than just something you say with your mouth.

When you truly are saying that somebody is your Lord, it means that you are going to submit to them. It means that you are going to see them as having a higher authority over your life than even you do. It means that you are at that point where you recognize you are a sinner in need of grace. It is when you proclaim Jesus as Lord and as Savior.

It is when you put your hope in Him and in the resurrection that you believe that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is also available to you. And so that at the end of your life, when we all lose the battle and these bodies begin to fade, that we put our hope in that resurrection power. This is when we have historically said, "You are now a believer or a Christian," and we use this phrase, "You have crossed the line of salvation." You have taken that first step by submitting to Him.

Now let me tell you, this definitely doesn't mean you have it all figured out. This doesn't mean that you will be perfect moving forward. And unfortunately, this also doesn't mean that life is going to be without troubles moving forward. In fact, the Scriptures say that you will experience troubles and trials and difficulties in this world.

There is not a single person on their journey with Jesus today that can say, "I am perfect, I have it all figured out, I know everything there is to know." We all continue to grow. That point of salvation is the launching point. It is the beginning of something beautiful, and I believe it is the most important decision you will ever make in your life. I believe that this decision of what you do with Jesus will determine your eternity.

And this step, because it's the most important decision you will ever make, and because it changes where you spend eternity, does require a celebration. And that celebration is often the next logical step in your journey. As we look in the book of Acts 2:38, Peter has just proclaimed the good news of Jesus to those that are listening, offering salvation to those that will make that proclamation.

And Peter says, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." The next logical and biblical step after salvation, after you have proclaimed Jesus as your Lord, is baptism. Baptism, as we have said over and over again, if you have been a part of the church, is this public proclamation of your personal faith.

As I was trying to think the best way to understand this, the best analogy for us to understand what baptism is. I thought about this idea of a wedding. And in a wedding, after you have the service and you've signed the legal documents, you are legally married, according to the state, when you sign the papers of the court. And after you have done your vows before God, you are viewed as married before God, but then after your wedding, most people have what is called a reception.

And this is the celebration. This is the time when you gather with friends and with family, and it's an opportunity to celebrate what has just happened. It's to celebrate this public proclamation that as you stood before family and friends, you have said with your mouth, "Jesus is my Lord." When you have your reception, you have said, "Yes, we are married. We are going to be one." This is the party moment.

It is the time that the family of believers gets to celebrate the rebirth of a new follower of Jesus. And so if you haven't been baptized, you skipped one of the most fun parts. One of the best steps in your journey is a

celebration, and so I encourage you, go back and do that. It will be fun, I promise. If you're listening to the announcements, we have probably what is our most popular time to get baptized coming up this August.

As somebody in the church opens up their property, they have a beautiful property, a beautiful pond, and we do a baptism outside there, we have dinner together, we celebrate together. If you remember a couple of years ago, we did that baptism, and it is a fun day, and it even poured down rain. Do you guys remember that? Those of you that were there? And so I like to say that on that day, those people we baptized got the best of both worlds because they were baptized by immersion, but also sprinkling, so they're covered, okay? We had a beautiful rainbow that night.

For those of you that were there, you remember, it was just a beautiful night. It truly is a time of celebration, but here's the beautiful part about this idea of baptism. As an added bonus, God can use your testimony of your public proclamation of faith in Jesus to inspire others to join the faith. Your testimony can draw others closer to Him. The symbolism in baptism is a powerful picture for us to see and to remember that when we immerse somebody in the water, it is like being buried with Christ.

And when we bring them back up out of the water, it's this idea of being brought back into a new life. The Scriptures say that when you confess Jesus as your Savior, you become a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come. Don't underestimate the power of baptism and how God can use that as your next step and the next step for somebody else.

After salvation and baptism, the next steps of our faith revolve more around this idea of personal habits, or historically, these have often been viewed as disciplines. The disciplines of our faith that enhance our relationship with Jesus. They help us grow. And these are ones that don't necessarily always fall in a sequential order, but I do think that there is an appropriate way for us to do this, logically.

The first habit that I want to talk about that potentially could be your next step, and is the next step in any relationship, is this idea of communication. It's difficult to have a relationship with somebody you don't talk to. And in our relationship with Jesus, we call this communication prayer. I told you, these would be life altering, right? Salvation, baptism, prayer. Prayer is that communication between you and God.

When I have the privilege of walking young couples through premarital counseling, the first topic that we always address is communication. I let them know that if you fail at communication, if you are not able to talk to each other and understand each other and hear each other, the future for you is going to be pretty rocky. It's going to be difficult in your marriage relationship.

But if you can succeed in the area of communication, I promise you there still will be trials, there still will be difficulties. Life is not going to be perfect, but if you can talk to each other and walk this path together, you will make it through. You see, you don't have a real relationship with someone if you never communicate with them. If you don't talk with somebody, it's not a real relationship, so it only makes sense.

Again, logical sense that in order to continue to grow in our relationship with Jesus, we need to talk with Him, and that talking goes both ways. Yes, it is sharing with Him, but it's also learning to listen. The Apostle Paul, as he was writing to the churches in Thessalonica, in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, gives us a very simple discipline in order to grow in our relationship with Jesus.

He says to pray without ceasing. Prayer should be a normal part of your day as you are communicating with Jesus. There are many opportunities that are appropriate for prayer. Before you eat, you offer a prayer of thanksgiving. While you're driving in the car, it's a great time that you can pray. I highly recommend you keep your eyes open when you pray in the car. Maybe it's before an important meeting or a test that you're taking.

And as you're getting ready to prepare to go in, you say, "God, I just want you to, I want to feel your presence, I want to feel your spirit and guide me in what is coming up." Maybe you're driving down the road or you're at home and you hear an ambulance going by. It's a great time to pray for whatever situation is taking place, and

you may not even know what it is. Here where we live, you often see the Samaritan helicopter go over, and I have made it a practice that whenever I see that helicopter, I pray for whatever is happening.

And unbeknownst to me, multiple times over the last few years, as I was praying for whoever was in that helicopter, I ended up getting a phone call hours later and know who was exactly in that helicopter as I work my way to the hospital and pray for whatever has just taken place. Pray before you go to bed. Pray with your spouse and with your kids and with others. Have corporate times of prayer.

And I need to let you know, you don't need to have a formal introduction or final conclusion to your prayer. It is a continual on and off conversation. You don't need to sign off when you're done. How weird would it be if you're talking with your spouse and you have a conversation, you say, "Okay, I'm done. See you later." Right? Amen. Conversation over. I know it's okay to say amen, but it's this idea that Paul is saying, "Pray without ceasing." It's something we just continue to do throughout the day.

You also need to know that there are no special words. There is no secret or perfect formula to somehow get God's attention. You don't need to use the right language in order for Him to hear you, and it's okay. I need you to hear this. As I look at Scripture and the conversations that people have with God, it is okay in your prayer life to be upset at God. It's okay to be angry at times.

It's okay to be frustrated and to express that emotion in your conversation. It's okay to be joyful. It's okay to be excited. It's okay to be sad. God is all-knowing, and so He knows what's going on in your heart. There's no need to try to hide that. Have you ever tried to hide your emotions to your spouse who knows you better than anybody else on this planet? Don't they always know if things aren't okay?

You can tell them it's okay, but they already know it's not. The same is true when you come to God. Don't try to hide your feelings. Don't try to hide what you're actually going through. He simply wants to have that conversation with you. Paul says in Ephesians 6:18, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests, with this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people." We are to have prayer as a part of our journey.

It's that next step growing in our prayer life. And along with prayer comes what I think is one of the ways that God most reveals Himself to us, and that is through reading the Scriptures. This is another step in your faith journey. By God's grace, one of the first verses that I memorized was Hebrews 4:12. The author of Hebrews, speaking about the Word of God, says this, "For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword.

It penetrates even to dividing, soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." I truly believe that by reading the Word of God, this is the main way that God changes us. It's the main way that He draws us closer to Him. It is how you get to know Him and how you get to know about Him. Many people say, and I believe God has revealed Himself to us through His Word.

It helps us to determine what is of Him and what is not of Him. It allows us to see the larger picture and the larger story of which we are all apart. And there really is no wrong way to read the Scriptures. There are some recommendations that I would give to you, as I always jokingly say, don't start in Leviticus, right? But there really is no wrong way to read the Scriptures. And there's so many resources that are available to us.

You can use Bible apps that are on your phone, and you can download many different ones that can get you going. You can find some type of online plan that will take you through the Scriptures. You can buy a new study Bible. There's something about having this new crisp Bible that makes you want to say, hey, I'm going to open up and read this, even though it's the same words that were in your old Bible, right? I've loved many of the graduation parties I've gone to this year.

Almost all of them have had a new Bible that the family has bought for the graduate and given an opportunity for people to write in them their favorite verse or an encouraging note or whatever else. Sometimes it's just that

simple. And someone says, "Oh, I want to pick that up and read that." Maybe it's receiving a Bible from somebody that has given it to you, and maybe it's from a loved one or a friend, and they wanted to give you maybe their old Bible. And so you say to yourself, "Well, I don't want this to go to waste. They've given it to me.

I want to get into it." Maybe you join some type of study group that is going through Scripture together because I firmly believe, yes, we should read Scripture alone, but Scripture was also meant to be read corporately. We can learn from each other, we can grow from each other. There's a great Bible app called YouVersion that has the Bible on it, but it also has a bunch of different plans, thousands of plans that you can search through and say, "I want to study this book," or, "I want to study this topic." And one of them that I joined this year, and Carla, I now know she is the one that sent me the invite.

Carla Dobson sent me the invite, but there's about 20 of us that are going through this one called the Bible Recap. Is anybody else doing this one or have done this one? It is awesome. She does such an amazing job of just kind of recapping everything that you've read. Sometimes it's confusing, and so I've really enjoyed doing that. Many of you already know that we have a Right Now Media subscription that is free for all of you that you can sign on to, you can get a free login. And again, you can search any Bible study you want in there and you can do it by yourself, you can do it with others.

One of the things I love about the YouVersion app is that you don't need to be physically present with those you're doing the Bible study with. You can do it all digitally and online. It truly is an amazing resource. Another way you can get into Scripture is listening to it audio. One of the things that I've learned here as I continue to get older, maybe this is why I'm getting the chair Tai Chi things from Facebook.

If I spend roughly 45 minutes is about my time frame that I have, if I'm sitting in my chair and I'm doing my own study or personal Bible study or prayer time, at about 45 minutes, I'll start falling asleep, all right? And so I've recognized, OK, I can't do that. And so I have found this app that has the Scripture and an audio, and so I throw in my headphones, and I'll just go walking up and down 200 here, all right? And doing my time with God or doing my study time. I have not yet fallen asleep while doing that, all right?

Maybe that's the next phase of my life as I get older. But it's finding a way to get God's Word into your heart and into your mind. It truly is living and active. I believe that it changes you. It transforms you. It helps you continually take your next steps towards Him. Now for the sake of time, I'm going to have to wait for these final four steps that I'm excited to share with you. Again, they're not secrets, they're not life-shattering, but it's just making the commitment to do them.

And so here is my recommendation for you. Maybe you're here today and you've never made that personal first decision to follow Jesus. And I just want to encourage you, there is no better day than today. Maybe you're just trying to figure this whole thing out. It is my prayer that the Spirit is knocking on the door of your heart and you say, "Yeah, this whole thing feels real. It just feels right." That you would surrender your life to Jesus and proclaim Him as Lord. There's no better day than today.

Maybe you're here today and you've made that decision to follow Jesus and maybe you prayed a prayer at home or even at church at the altar, but you've not been baptized. I would encourage you to go back and pick up that step. Sign up for the baptism that's coming up this August. There's forms out in the foyer you can get. I would love to talk with you about that, but I'm really just saying I would love to party with you, all right? It's a celebration time.

It is a time for us to celebrate what God has done, and for you to make that public proclamation to family, to friends, to the church community, that Jesus is your Savior. Maybe you're here today and you're a new believer, or maybe you've even been one for a long time, but prayer has just been a struggle for you. Maybe you struggle falling asleep like I do, and so it's difficult for you to make time to do that. You've not quite figured it out. Can I just encourage you today to make the commitment to say, "You know what?

I want to reinvest in that area. I want to grow in my communication with God." There's many people that would love to walk through that with you. Finally, maybe you're here and you've been a believer for a while, but you still haven't really searched God out through His Word. Yeah, you come to church, you hear me talk about it, maybe you even go to another class, but you've not really personally said, "You know what?"

I want to invest in my relationship with God by getting to know Him through His Word." Maybe you find a plan and you change that. Maybe you ask somebody to hold you accountable. Maybe you go through this reading plan with someone else. And I need you to know that even if you have already done all of these things, you say, "Pastor, that's great, I came to church. You told me to be saved, to pray, and to read my Bible, and to be baptized. Check, check, check. I've done all of those.

Can I just tell you, we can always improve. We can always improve. We can always grow. These are very practical and simple steps for you to grow in your relationship with Jesus. This is a journey that we are walking on. Prayer is a journey. Reading your Bible is a journey. Whatever it is, this is my desire for you today, that you would make the decision, that you would plant a stake in the ground and say, "You know what?"

This is the most important relationship in my life, and so I want to invest in it." Then that you would grab somebody that would hold you accountable, that you wouldn't leave today and think, well, maybe next time, I'm a little busy right now, but that you would follow through with the discipline today and not wait. The altars are always open for you to come and do business with God. And as we say, usually if you come to the altar, we know that means you just want to have your private time with God. No one's going to bother you unless you ask us.

We'll have people on the sides of the sanctuary that would love to pray with you. If you have questions or you just want somebody to pray for you, they would love to pray for you today, but the altars are open. Please feel free to come up, but I just encourage you, whatever that next step is for you, don't wait, start today. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us where we're at. Every single one of us is on a different point of their journey.

I thank You that You continually draw us closer to You. I thank You for Your grace and Your mercy that makes this relationship possible. Lord, help us to have that discipline for some of these habits that it would be a priority in our lives. God, that You would receive the praise. I truly believe that we are blessed the closer we get to You.

So continue to draw us close. We ask this in Jesus' name.